

www.chicagotribune.com/business/content/education/chi-student-suit-both-03mar03,0,1942205.story

chicagotribune.com

Expelled Bolingbrook High freshman sues, alleges racial bias

Bolingbrook principal says case handled well

By Jo Napolitano

Tribune staff reporter

March 3, 2008

A Mexican-American freshman at [Bolingbrook](#) High School said he was expelled last month because of his race, a charge the district denies.

School officials said they would not comment on the specifics of the case because the boy is a minor, but they said he was treated fairly.

Roger Coronado Jr., 15, of Bolingbrook filed a complaint Saturday in U. S. District Court, listing Valley View Public School District 365U and an unidentified Bolingbrook police officer among the defendants.

Coronado said he was eating his lunch in the cafeteria Feb. 4 when a group of Mexican-American youths sat alongside him at a mostly empty table.

He said security officers approached the group, asking to see the students' identification cards. Coronado complied.

Shortly after, the Hispanic youths sitting beside him got into a verbal argument with a group of black students. Coronado said he stood up to move out of the way, thinking there would be a physical fight between the two groups.

The argument dwindled and Coronado went to his next class, he said.

The boy said he heard nothing more about the incident until Feb. 7, when he was sitting in his first-period class. That's when he was told to report to a small police office inside the school. A Bolingbrook police officer told Coronado that he would have to pay a \$50 fine.

"I said, 'For what?' He said, 'Don't act stupid.' He said I flashed gang signs," Coronado said.

The boy said the officer made him sign paperwork, but he didn't know what it said.

"I asked to see what it is," Coronado said. "He said, 'Just sign it. It's a referral.' He had a hard tone. He was getting mad. I signed it. He was holding the paper. I didn't read it. All I could see was my name on top."

Coronado said he has no gang affiliation, and he denied flashing gang signs.

He said he was expelled from school for a year and was told to report to an alternative high school in [Joliet](#). He has been home-schooled, with the help of a private tutor, since his expulsion.

Lt. Ken Teppel, spokesman for the Bolingbrook Police Department, said he will withhold comment until the department receives a copy of the lawsuit.

Bolingbrook High School Principal James Mitchem Jr. said Coronado was not the only student expelled, though he would not provide more details. He was unaware of the lawsuit.

"All of the cases were handled properly," Mitchem said. "All the kids were given due-process rights."

The principal said students who are being considered for expulsion are asked to appear before a district hearing officer. School officials are also present for the meeting. The findings are passed to the school board, which makes the final decision on the student's fate.

"In this case, my client was summoned to what was supposed to be a hearing. But when he arrived, he was not permitted to confront his accusers or present witnesses," said Christopher Cooper, Coronado's attorney.

jnapolitano@tribune.com

Copyright © 2008, [Chicago Tribune](#)